



Ontario's Prince Edward County - A Cyclist's paradise

Prince Edward County has to rate as a truly outstanding area for bicycle touring in Ontario. The county is located on a large peninsula (more like an island) in the northeast corner of Lake Ontario, and it offers you a patchwork of quiet country roads, dramatic vistas, uninterrupted views of Lake Ontario, a series of interesting towns, a rich local history, and even a couple of great bike shops.

Riding in Prince Edward County takes place against a backdrop of changing landscapes and seascapes. On one side of the peninsula you



The view of a vineyard with Lake Ontario in the background.

can find yourself on a road high above the shoreline and overlooking an almost fiord-like arm of the Adolphus Reach. On the opposite side you will see the wide open waters of Lake Ontario, the view of which is a reminder that this

body of water is really an inland sea.

Onshore there are the typical farm fields, but there are also many routes where you will be cycling through apple orchards and vineyards. There are places in Prince Edward County where you can find yourself riding next to the largest anchorage on Lake Ontario, two wildlife reserves, and three provincial parks, one of which is home to the largest freshwater sand dunes in the world.

A changing scenery isn't Prince Edward County's only asset. In addition to the usual amenities such as restaurants, pubs, and stores, you will discover that the place seems to be littered with country inns, bed & breakfasts, and antique shops. The region's three major towns, Wellington, Bloomfield, and Picton cater to tourists, but for the most part, are relaxing and easy going communities.

Prince Edward County offers a range of attractions, including historic homes, a number of museums, and geological features such as the aforementioned sand dunes and the oddly situated "Lake on the Mountain". There are several spots where you can stop for a quick swim on those hot summer afternoons. If you really want to spend the day in the water, you will be able to head to the world-class beaches in the Sand Banks Provincial Park.

Wineries & a Taste Trail

One of the more unique attractions of Prince Edward County is that it is home to a surprising number of wineries, complete with tasting rooms. Some of these also operate superb

restaurants. There is something to be said about enjoying a glass of wine and good food in an open air restaurant that is surrounded by vineyards, and that overlooks Lake Ontario.

The county plays up the presence of these wineries by designating a route across the peninsula as the "Taste Trail", which tends to run along Highway 33. In addition to the wineries, the Taste Trail features a host of other establishments which cater to culinary delights, including many of the area's fine restaurants, as well as a chocolatier in Bloomfield, a brewery in Picton, and even a small cheese factory in Milford. This cheese factory is known as the Black River Cheese Company, and has been around since 1901.

What really makes Prince Edward County ideal for cycling is that it is crisscrossed with hundreds of kilometres of relaxing country roads that rarely have much traffic. Some of the busier routes, including most of Highway 33 (a regional road that is also known as the Loyalist Parkway) have good paved shoulders, although these can be a little narrow in some areas (sometimes a less than a metre wide).

The county does have one off-road path on what used to be a railway line. It is called the Millennium Trail, and runs from the west end of the peninsula to Picton. However, it is not really worth considering given the abundance of quiet country roads in the area. Moreover, much of this trail appears to be covered with coarse gravel, and parts can be very difficult to ride on with bikes equipped with road tires (even relatively wide road tires).

Despite all of its positive points, Prince Edward County does have one major drawback for bicycle touring. The Sand Banks Provincial Park is one of the most popular facilities of its kind in Ontario, and it generates a lot of traffic on certain roads during the busy summer months. The good news is that it is relatively easy to keep clear of this traffic if you know which roads to avoid.

Try to stay away from roads 1 and 49. These lead to Picton from opposite sides of the county. Likewise, avoid roads 10, 11, 12, and 18. These are local roads between the Sand Banks

Provincial Park and the towns of Bloomfield and Picton. Fortunately, this is a small percentage of the roads available to cyclists on the peninsula.

Getting to Prince Edward County

The easiest way to get to Prince Edward County is, of course, to drive there by car. Another possibility is to take the train to Belleville, which is located immediately north of the peninsula. You can bring a bike on some (but not all) VIA passenger trains for an extra \$20, and it is possible to get a special protective box at certain stations. The train station in Belleville is located right in town, and only a few kilometres away from the bridge that leads to Prince Edward County. You will have to be prepared to do a bit of climbing to get over the bridge which arches high above the Bay of Quinte (the 2 lane road on the bridge is reasonably wide and has a very narrow paved shoulder).

If you are into serious touring, you can always get to Prince Edward County by bike. When coming from the west, take Road 64 across the Murray Canal until it hooks up with Highway 33. Unfortunately, there are a couple of stretches along this route where there is no paved shoulder for a few kilometres.

If you are coming from the east (from Kingston), head west on Highway 33. This 50 kilometre stretch of road generally follows the Lake Ontario shoreline, has a good paved shoulder, isn't too busy, and is a very enjoyable ride in its own right. This road ends at the Glenora Ferry, which you will take to cross Adolphus Reach to the peninsula. This ferry leaves every 15 minutes during the day, and it is a free service. This route is the nicest way to get to Prince Edward County.

Once on the peninsula, you may wonder exactly where you should go to start your rides. The answer, with the exception of those busy roads noted earlier, is almost anywhere. A good road map and tourist brochures will help you figure out some routes and decide on possible destinations. The local Chamber of Commerce publishes a map for cyclists which sells for a

couple of dollars. This isn't very much, but one wonders why there is a need to charge for this map when there is so much free material available to car-based tourists. This bicycle map does have a number of suggested routes. It's nice to have, but not essential.

Planning your ride

When planning your rides, you could, for example, use one of the many the bed & breakfasts, inns, or hotels in the Picton area as a base for taking various day trips around the county. Heading out on the peninsula's eastern most finger is a particularly nice ride. From Picton, take Highway 33 east. About half a kilometre before the Glenora Ferry terminal, you should turn right to get on Road 7.

At this point you will have to climb a good size hill, but it is worth it for the view you will soon get of Picton Bay and Adolphus Reach. This is also where you come across the "Lake on the Mountain". There is something odd about this lake which is perched high above the water level of Lake Ontario. There is a small day-use provincial park in this area. It has a parking lot, picnic tables, and public washrooms.

As you continue east on Road 7 you'll descend a few long slopes and will come across some great scenery and picturesque farms. As you get close to the end of the finger, the road veers to

the south, and you will ride past Prinyers Cove, one of the more popular anchorages on this part of Lake Ontario (the author of this web site used to have a cruising sailboat in Kingston, and anchored here on many occasions.)

If you have time, you may want to turn onto Bayside Road which runs next to Prinyers Cove. This side road is a dead end, but is still interesting, and it allows you to pass by the small marina which serves the anchorage. Here it is possible to stock up on bottled water and cold drinks. This is worth mentioning because there are not many places to buy such essentials in this particular corner of Prince Edward County.



After Prinyers Cove, Road 7 becomes Road 8, and slowly turns west and runs along the Lake Ontario shoreline. You will soon find yourself riding past apple orchards and a series of vineyards that gradually slope down towards the water. This area is home to two estate wineries, one of which also produces apple cider. Both have tasting rooms and restaurants that overlook Lake Ontario, and are worth checking out. In season you will also come across road side stalls and speciality stores selling local produce.

Road 8 leads to Waupoos, where you find

the Duke of Marysburgh Pub, complete with a screened-in patio. Shortly afterwards, you have to climb a couple of manageable hills. As you do, you will get a nice view of the surrounding region, including Waupoos Island in the distance. The area in front of this island is another anchorage which often fills up with cruising sailboats. From here Road 8 turns inland and heads back to Picton. When you get back, you will have covered close to 60 kilometres.

Other rides & destinations

There are many other rides you could plan from the Picton area. For example, you could head towards Road 13 and explore the very scenic southern sections of Prince Edward County. At the junction of Roads 13 and 10 you will come across the very interesting Mariners Park Museum. There's no admission fee, and donations are encouraged. Later you might want to swing by Milford and pick up a snack at the Black River Cheese Company.

When heading back to Picton from the southern part of the peninsula, try using Road 22. Here you will find the Picton Airport. It was quickly built during World War II as a pilot training facility for the British Commonwealth. It's a real step back in time because old hangers, rows of dilapidated barracks, and even the sentry posts are still standing.

If you do decide to use Picton as a home base for rides in the county, it is worth mentioning that it is an attractive town of 4000 people with history going back to 1837. It is also one of the largest centres in Prince Edward County, and it has good size grocery stores, a small hospital, and a reasonable selection of restaurants, bars, and stores, including a bike shop (called the Ideal Bike). However, one of the main roads to the Sand Banks Provincial Park runs through the centre of town. This means there can sometimes be traffic jams on Picton's main street on busy weekends. You can avoid this congestion by taking sides streets; it is just a little surprising

to see so much traffic in what would otherwise be a quiet town.

Needless to say, any accommodations that are reasonably central can be used as a home base when riding around Prince Edward County. For example, the towns of Bloomfield and Wellington would make excellent starting points for rides on the west side of the peninsula. The terrain tends to be quite flat in this area, and if you plan your ride to go on Closson Road and the western end of Greer Road, you will ride past four wineries. Most have tasting rooms, and some also operate restaurants. In Wellington it is also easy to find the public beach or the town waterfront park. Either can come in handy for a quick dip in Lake Ontario on a hot summer afternoon.

If you find yourself in Bloomfield, be sure to check out the Bloomfield Bicycle Company. This bicycle shop has been around for close to two decades, it is run by cycling enthusiasts who love to promote both biking and Prince Edward County. Here you will be able to buy the bicycle map of the region as well as their now famous "TV SUCKS -Ride your bike" stickers. These stickers (bumper & bike size) are starting to show up everywhere in Ontario, and have been spotted in such faraway places as Texas, Ireland, and even Japan.

Prince Edward County has over 800 kilometres of shoreline, and it probably takes several days to circumnavigate the peninsula on its major roads by bike. In other words, this article only touches on a fraction of what the county has to offer. Likewise, the map which accompanies this text only shows the region's larger roads. The best way to gain a full appreciation of the area is to get on your bike and head on over. Like the licence plate says, it's "Yours to Discover".

Happy cycling in Prince Edward County,
and happy wine tasting.

Michael McGoldrick,
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